

REMARKS

This Amendment is in response to the Office Action of November 20, 2002, in which the Examiner objected to certain technical objections to the claims. The Examiner also rejected claims 1-8 as unpatentable various over McClung et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,085,027), Kelly (U.S. Patent No. 5,310,435), Greenfield (U.S. Patent No. 5,475,953) and Ciancio et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,063,475). According to the Examiner, McClung et al. discloses a method for molding wooden panels with radiused corners having a thermoformed polymer coating. The Examiner asserts that Applicants have admitted that it is known to use a thermoforming process for conforming a plastic sheet into a shaped article. In addition, the Examiner asserts that Kelly discloses a method for making corners where the corner covering element is shaped prior to its insertion into the cavities formed in the panel. The Examiner further asserts that Greenfield discloses the use of edge molding strip constructed of heavy duty plastic, such as aluminum, ABS or rubber. In addition the Examiner rejected claim 8 further in view of Ciancio, noting that Ciancio applies a corner covering element which protects the extended portion of the panel.

The claims have been amended to overcome the Examiner's various technical objections, and such a determination is earnestly solicited.

The Examiner's rejection of the claims is respectfully traversed for the reasons set forth below.

The claims have been amended in order to recite the relative order of the steps for forming the method. According to the invention, the bottom edge of the panel is machined in order to remove the radius bottom corner and to create one or more grooves having edges milled therein. Thereafter, a coating is thermoformed on the top, side and bottom surfaces of the panel up to at least as far as the milled edges formed by the milling step. The method further includes forming a unitary corner-covering element having a bottom edge portion

which corresponds with the bottom edge removed by milling. Thereafter the corner-covering element is inserted in the grooves so that the edge of the corner-covering element is flush with the bottom and sides without milling.

The reference cited by the Examiner, namely McClung, shows a panel in which veneers or high pressure plastic laminates are adhered to the surface of the core material. Thereafter, a groove is formed in the corner which removes a portion of the core material and a portion of the laminate. Thereafter, a fill a piece is inserted in the groove and the exposed edge of the fill a piece is machined to form a rounded edge.

The difference, therefore, between the invention and the cited reference has to do with the order in which the steps are preformed. The ordered steps are important because the laminate is installed on the panel after the groove is milled in the core or uncoated portion of the panel. The covering is thereafter thermoformed onto the core and a machined corner element is located in the groove formed by machining. The corner-element abuts the edges of the thermoformed material to form a smooth surface without further machining. The order of the steps in the invention are sequenced in a different way than the cited references and the sequence results in an improved product.

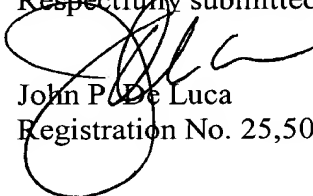
Kelly simply discloses a conventional method for forming a countertop wherein the edge of the countertop is machined after the laminate is applied and the rounded corner piece is attached to the exposed edge of the counter. In the Kelly reference, the laminate is applied to the edge piece and to the surface of the panel prior to the machining step where the rounded corner is formed. While this arrangement may be acceptable for ridged materials such as formica or corian or other ridged veneers, the method is not advantageous for the application of thermoformable coverings such as in the claimed invention.

It is therefore believed that the method claims, as amended, clearly and fully distinguish over the cited references. Likewise, it is believed that the apparatus claims which

are directed to the structure formed in accordance with the method are likewise distinguished over the cited references.

It is therefore respectfully requested the Examiner reconsider his rejections of the claims, the allowance of which is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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